

# South Chilterns Sub- Catchment Stakeholder Workshops Facilitator's Report

Lower Middle Thames, 6th February 2013, held in Marlow.

## OBJECTIVES FOR THE WORKSHOPS

1. Raise awareness of the Water Framework Directive and the collaborative approach DEFRA want to develop for Catchment Management.
2. To hear from the Environment Agency about the current state of the rivers and waterways in each sub catchment and why it's important to improve them.
3. To find out what concerns people have about the management of water in the catchment.
4. To begin to develop a vision for the Catchment and identify what kind of projects and actions will contribute towards achieving the vision.
5. Enthuse organisations, both statutory and non-statutory, to look for opportunities to work together in the future.
6. Encourage networking between organisations and individuals who have an interest in the sub catchment.

**1. The Wider Context for Catchment Planning and the Water Framework Directive:** presentation from Alison Futter, Environment Agency.

**2. The issues in this Catchment and some examples of what has already been done to improve things:** presentation from Jenni Balmer, Environment Agency.

### **3. Questions and clarifications following the presentations:**

- the status is moderate and fluctuates so EA is unable to say if it is improving or worsening. Long term monitoring is required.
- the moderate status is caused primarily by artificial modifications and manmade structures as well as pollution.
- agree that a balance has to be struck between creating flood barriers and removing barriers to fish.
- People commented that it's difficult to know who in the EA to talk to and sometimes they contradict each other. EA acknowledge that they need to improve communication between staff departments, that is why they have established a Catchment Team who can get an over view of different issues and determine the most appropriate person to talk to the public.
- it will be important to take account of other strategic plans and policies that impact Catchment Management. The River Thames Alliance has been working for many years to try to balance different priorities from interested organisations and encourage joint working.
- the EA should communicate its successes more often - welcomed hearing about the projects to improve the rivers today.

- We must remember that the Catchment Management Plan is about the landscape the rivers run through, not just about the rivers. And pollution isn't just from agricultural pesticides, it's from householders as well.
- some people wondered if we should ignore the requirements of the WFD since it is an EU directive, others pointed out that most people present wanted what the WFD wants: a healthy sustainable river environment. Some are concerned that the UK Government is not strongly committed enough.

#### **4. A Vision for a healthy and sustainable Lower Middle Thames Sub Catchment**

*Note: this was produced by grouping together post-its notes to agree key themes. The facilitator asked people what they would see on a 'miracle day'.*

#### **POLITICS & PLANNING POLICIES PROTECT RIVERS AND FLOOD PLAINS**

- no more development on flood plains
- protect views of river
- provide EA with legal veto on planning proposals that might increase flood risk
- developers valuing and respecting the river
- all Thames Planning Authorities work together
- cost benefit analysis required

#### **COMMUNICATION**

- clearer access for members of the public to the appropriate person
- better cooperation between land owners and EA
- more joined up policies
- a clear plan supported by different agencies
- all measures to be evidence based, not based on opinion & perception

#### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- more connection between people and the rivers, valuing it for wildlife
- have meetings outside working hours
- more education - promote responsible use of water and understanding of the impact of activities (e.g. Henley Regatta)
- better information boards

#### **ACCESS AND RECREATION**

- recreational activities are safeguarded
- provide footpaths, slip ways etc
- all powered boats to be converted to electric power
- fewer boats permanently moored to the banks

#### **A FAIR BALANCE**

- a sustainable, multi-functional river, valued for heritage and wildlife as well as a for a water resource.
- balancing the demands for recreation, hydro power, ecological enhancement, farming, historical structures, flood mitigation schemes and new developments.
- planning controls to ensure the natural river is protected

## ECO MANAGEMENT

- need to minimise flooding risks balanced with protection of ecology
- no culverts and barriers, more traditional flood meadows
- natural, well managed banks where possible
- invasive non-native species under control
- protected habitats
- control of silt, road run off and other pollution sources like sewage outflow

### **5. Ideas for actions to work towards the vision.**

*Note: people worked together in small groups to come up with ideas. A full type up of the notes from each group is in appendix 1 on page 5.*

### **6. Final feedback from each group and plenary discussion.**

Group 1. We want to see a single coherent plan supported by all the relevant organisations in the Catchment; the EA, local Councils and central Government all working together.

Group 2. We want to see continuity of EA support and perhaps consider appointing a body to be responsible for each section of the river; for spotting pollution etc. How will all this be funded? Perhaps riverside properties could contribute a local ring-fenced tax for improvements to the river?

Group 3. Land Management is crucial, e.g. create holding ponds to minimise siltation, run off & flooding. The CMP must encourage more take up of stewardship schemes but also appreciate that farmers must make a living.

Group 4. Community engagement must happen - think of ways to educate and involve young people e.g. competitions in schools, get local people involved in projects like litter picking. Access to the water is important, balanced with sensible health & safety.

Other points raised were about the need for an integrated, strategic approach to planning for the Catchment but that it needs to be resourced and properly managed like any other public spending project. It might be possible to access Heritage Lottery Funds and other funding 'pots' if organisations with common aims come together.

Neil Tytler from the Foundation for Water Research (FWR) explained that FWR has offered its website ([www.fwr.org](http://www.fwr.org)) as a place to find out about progress on the Catchment Management Plan. It is hoped that all interested organisations will work together and form a steering group to work with the EA to develop and deliver more integrated Catchment management to achieve a healthy sustainable water environment.

### **7. Summary of individual feedback forms.**

7.1 Seven people thought the objectives had been fully or almost fully met. Seven said only partially met and one person thought we didn't meet any of our objectives.

7.2 Many people found the EA presentations informative and said it very useful to meet other interested parties, to exchange ideas and hear about different projects. Some didn't think the post-it session or small group discussions were as useful.

7.3 Key messages for taking forward the Catchment Management Plan:

- focus on delivery and a few key issues - people will lose interest if it doesn't deliver
- good communication is key
- liaise with central government & other strategic plans
- remember the whole Catchment (ponds, wetlands, landscape) - do not over focus on the rivers
- include recreational activities like canoeing

7.4 Three people didn't like the way the facilitator ran the meeting, others were very satisfied.

### **8. Comments received via email from those who could not attend the Lower Middle Thames sub-catchment workshop:**

- The Medmenham Parish Council is concerned about the flooding of the River Thames onto property owned by residents in the area. Comments are made by Medmenham Parish Council on planning applications for properties within the flood plain area, always make note of the impact of the water soak away caused by extensive building. Unfortunately it appears that these comments are either not taken on board or rejected automatically by Wycombe District Council. This is an increasing concern to the Parish Council as more houses in the area are increasing their building footprint. There was severe flooding during the recent period of heavy rain.
- Please register an interest from myself and those who would like more access/egress to waterways of the whole South Chilterns Catchment area, in order to partake in the sport of kayaking and canoeing. Those who do enjoy the sport would like better access and egress to all water in the UK/South Chilterns Catchment area. Maybe DEFRA/Government could look at the ancient riparian rights and have them repealed, taking the ownership back to the river bank of that waterway. The river water is not static and the silt below moves with time.
- I have a busy full time job and am unable to take time for these workshops. If you are feeding back, I am not sure this is a very efficient means of gathering or passing on the information. Certainly for me, an introductory factsheet and a questionnaire would be much better. Indeed, the stated aim of identifying "issues" on the catchments seems hardly to need a "workshop". Perhaps they are trying to fulfil a government criterion for these types of report.
- This timing is not that good for those with full time jobs and cover positions on a voluntary basis. There never is an easy way to fulfil and please everyone, especially when those who conduct these are normally full time paid officers from the relevant government bodies. This just shows another back hand way this government operates in order to push their underlying agenda through, 'divide and conquer', After the consultation has taken place they can say that certain bodies did not bother to attend, which means that a sport that gives so much pleasure to young and old alike will be penalised yet again in favour of other interests that wish to have the sport excluded.

## Appendix 1: Ideas for Action

*Note: similar ideas have been grouped together.*

<b>Ideas</b>	<b>Who could lead on it and be involved?</b>
<p><i>Improve land use management within the Catchment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>retrofit interception systems to prevent 90% of urban run off going into rivers</i></li> <li>• <i>better maintenance of ditches</i></li> <li>• <i>install cattle drinkers to prevent bank erosion &amp; silting</i></li> <li>• <i>interception ponds to catch run off e.g upstream Thames Conservation Trust Project</i></li> <li>• <i>lobby Defra</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>LNP</i></p> <p><i>local communities and land owners</i></p> <p><i>Highways Agency &amp; County Council</i></p> <p><i>NFU reps, CLA , NE - steward-ship schemes</i></p> <p><i>Thames Water</i></p> <p><i>EA</i></p>
<p><i>Coherent representation across all organisations within a Catchment - an integrated approach to coordinate activities.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>requires coordination and funding</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>Partnership to include EA, local &amp; county councils, NE, water co's, businesses, land owners, retailers, emergency services, communities</i></p>
<p><i>Make use of the resources we have:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>clean fish ladders</i></li> <li>• <i>use hydro power</i></li> <li>• <i>enjoy the rivers</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>EA support local community projects and share good practice</i></p>
<p><i>Community engagement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>education/awareness about water efficiency &amp; pollution, SUDS</i></li> <li>• <i>some disagreement on amount of public access to the river - e.g. who decides on things like fencing, safety issues, protection of habitats etc</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>EA provide training/support</i></p> <p><i>include schools, water companies, local councils, riparian land owners, voluntary groups, Wildlife Trusts</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>reinstate a local river bailiff or warden</i></li> <li>• <i>requires funding (lottery funding?)</i></li> </ul>	
<i>Riverside tax on properties close to the river - to be ring fenced for improvements</i>	<i>Local Authorities</i>

## Attendees

NAME	ORGANISATION
Maxine Forshaw	FWR
Neil Tytler	FWR
Jenni Balmer	Environment Agency
Alison Futter	Environment Agency
Rowena Harris	Dialogue by Design
Phil Emmett	Little Marlow Parish Council/Farmer
Kevin East	Canoe England
Simon Smith	London Anglers Association
Geraint Burrows	Environment Agency
Mike Overall	Chiltern Society Little Marlow Lakes
Lesley Sproat	Environment Agency
Tom Nixed	NFU
Janice Smith	Environment Agency
David Steele	The Marlow Society & River User Group 6
Richard Mayon-White	River Thames Society
Nathalie Marten	Pond Conservation
Tasmin Atley	Oxfordshire County Council
Sharon Henson	Parish Councils of Hambleden, Piddington, Wheeler End and West Wycombe
Craig Hampton	Environment Agency
Cat Robinson	Environment Agency
Peter May	Bisham Abbey Sailing & Navigation School
Trish Rae	Henley Town Council
Dave Rushton	Benson Parish Council
Suzanne Brown	Marlow Town Council
Geoff Thomas	Shiplake Parish Council