



**REPORT TITLE: River Cam, Chalk Streams and Tributaries – Strategic Review
and Environmental Projects**

To:

Councillor Martin Smart, Executive Councillor for Nature, Open Spaces and City Services
Services, Climate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee 21st September 2026

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All

Director Approval: Director James Elms confirms that the report author has sought the advice of all appropriate colleagues and given due regard to that advice; that the equalities impacts and other implications of the recommended decisions have been assessed and accurately presented in the report; and that they are content for the report to be put to scrutiny.

1.	Recommendations
1.1	Scrutiny is asked to note the following report (in response to the resolution of Full Council in July 2026) and comment on the draft recommendations going to Cabinet on 23 September (see 1.2).
1.2	It is recommended that Cabinet: a. Chalk-stream restoration and external funding i. Note the significant programme of existing Council and partnership activity to protect, restore and improve the River Cam, its chalk streams and tributaries. ii. Note the evidence emerging from the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project and support its transition into a Cambridge city-wide chalk-stream restoration programme. iii. Approve the acceptance of grant funding of up to £1.9 million from South

Staffordshire Water (Cambridge Water) to support the development and delivery of restoration projects across Cambridge's chalk-stream network, including Coldham's Brook, Cherry Hinton Brook, Hobson's Brook, Vicar's Brook and associated springheads and connections to the River Cam.

- iv. **Approve** officers to secure grant funding of approximately **£600,000**, to develop and deliver a resilient, nature-based pollution-mitigation scheme for Hobson's Brook, subject to final agreement of the funding terms.
- v. **Delegate authority** to the Assistant Director for Public Realm and Environment, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer, to finalise the necessary grant and partnership agreements relating to the South Staffordshire Water and Hobson's Brook pollution-mitigation scheme provided that the final terms do not create material unfunded liabilities for the Council.
- vi. **Support** the continued development of an evidence-led restoration programme across Cambridge's chalk-stream network, with individual interventions determined by hydrological, water-quality, ecological and other relevant evidence.

b. River infrastructure and Jesus Green

- i. **Note** progress on the Council's River Cam infrastructure, including the proposed stabilisation and replacement of the Jesus Green river wall and its relationship with the future repair and management of Jesus Green Lock.
- ii. **Recommend to Council to approve** an increase in the Jesus Green river wall project budget from the **£850,000 approved in October 2024 to a maximum of £2.441 million**, to enable the stabilisation and replacement works to proceed and the competitive procurement process to commence.
- iii. **Approve** an open, two-stage procurement process comprising:
 - a. the appointment of a preferred contractor under a Pre-Construction Services Agreement; and

- b. subject to an acceptable final design, construction methodology, cost plan and contract sum, entry into the main construction contract.

iv. **Support** the Council using its convening role to work with the Conservators of the River Cam, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, relevant public bodies, businesses and other partners to:

- a. explore sustainable financial and commercial opportunities for the repair and future management of Jesus Green Lock; and
- b. strengthen the longer-term financial sustainability and resilience of the Conservators of the River Cam.

c. Water quality, water resources and environmental projects

- i. **Note** the work undertaken and planned at Sheep's Green, and the importance of Designated Bathing Water monitoring data in informing continued engagement with the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and other relevant partners.
- ii. **Note** the work being undertaken through the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service in relation to water scarcity, abstraction, water efficiency, wastewater capacity and sustainable growth.
- iii. **Support** the continued development of externally funded environmental improvement projects, including opportunities available through the Cambridge Water Pebble Fund, subject to the Council's normal governance, financial and approval arrangements.
- iv. **Support** the development, consultation and adoption of watercourse land drainage model byelaws, subject to the necessary consultation and approval processes, to strengthen the protection and management of the River Cam, associated chalk streams, water environments and adjacent public spaces.

	d. Coordination and partnership working i. Support continued partnership working with statutory bodies, catchment organisations, voluntary and community groups, academic institutions and other partners to protect and improve the River Cam and its tributaries. ii. Agree that future river and chalk-stream activity should increasingly be developed and managed as a coordinated programme, enabling the Council and its partners to identify shared priorities, funding opportunities, intended outcomes, dependencies and gaps in provision.
2.	Purpose and reason for the report
2.1	This report responds to the resolution of Full Council in July 2026 requesting an officer report reviewing current Council activity relating to the River Cam and its tributaries, existing partnership arrangements, opportunities for improvement, and alignment with the Council's Biodiversity Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy and the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan. The motion recognises the River Cam and its tributaries as important environmental, ecological, recreational and cultural assets and confirms that the Council will continue to have regard to the impact of its decisions on the health of the river, consistent with its statutory duties, powers and responsibilities. The Council has an important role as a significant riverbank landowner, local planning authority, open-space manager, land drainage authority, project funder and delivery partner. It undertakes riverbank management, biodiversity enhancement, sustainable drainage and flood resilience work, manages public access and assets adjoining the river and is directly involved in a growing programme of river and chalk-stream restoration. Responsibility for the health and management of the River Cam is distributed between several organisations. These include the Environment Agency, Cambridge Water, Anglian Water, the Conservators of the River Cam, Natural England, Cambridgeshire County Council, universities and colleges, other riparian landowners and local communities. This report therefore considers both the activity for which the City Council is directly responsible and the wider partnerships through which the Council can influence water

	quality, water quantity, biodiversity, river infrastructure and the long-term resilience of the Cam catchment. The report also covers investment in river infrastructure, including the Council-owned river wall and work relating to Jesus Green Lock; activity at Sheep's Green; planning and water-resource work through the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service; and collaboration with statutory, voluntary, academic and community partners.
3.	Background and Key Issues
3.1	Full Council considered a motion concerning the River Cam and its tributaries in July 2026. The adopted motion recognised a series of aspirations for the river, including its ability to flow, sustain biodiversity, remain free from pollution, connect with other watercourses and be capable of restoration. The amended motion recognises that the Council must act within its statutory duties, powers and responsibilities and that responsibility for the river is shared between several organisations. Full Council specifically requested an officer report reviewing current Council activity, partnership arrangements, opportunities for improvement and alignment with relevant Council strategies and the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. The motion also recognises the extensive evidence already prepared through the Local Plan process concerning water scarcity, abstraction reduction and sustainable growth and supports continued collaboration with relevant partners. The purpose of this report is not to establish a new body responsible for the River Cam. It brings together activity already being undertaken by the Council and its partners, identifies the areas in which the Council can make the greatest contribution, and considers how that work can be better coordinated. The environmental conditions described in the motion are interacting processes rather than separate issues. Flow, groundwater recharge, sediment movement, water chemistry, temperature, pollution and ecological connectivity all influence the ability of freshwater habitats to support characteristic plants and wildlife. An observed environmental problem does not necessarily establish its principal cause. For example, evidence of low river flow may raise legitimate concerns but will not, by itself, establish the relative contributions of abstraction, groundwater levels, recharge,

	augmentation or groundwater-river exchange. Determining causation and selecting an effective response requires appropriately integrated and specialist evidence. The Council's approach is therefore based on distinguishing between identifying a problem, establishing its cause and determining the most effective and sustainable intervention. It also recognises that pollution, nutrients and sediment entering a springhead, tributary or drainage network can subsequently move through the connected freshwater system towards the River Cam.
4.	Strategic Context
4.1	The Council's work to protect and enhance the River Cam, its tributaries and the wider chalk stream network sits within an increasingly strong national and local policy framework for nature recovery, climate resilience and sustainable water management. The work described in this report contributes directly to the Council's Biodiversity Strategy 2022–2030, Climate Change Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy 2026–2036 and emerging planning policy, while also supporting wider sub-regional priorities. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy Of particular significance is the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), published in December 2025. Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a statutory component of the Environment Act 2021 framework and are intended to identify priorities and opportunities for recovering and enhancing biodiversity and to provide a spatial framework for coordinated action. The LNRS is particularly relevant to Cambridge because it recognises rivers, streams, drains and their associated floodplains as an important connected ecological network. All rivers and their floodplains within the strategy area are identified as local priorities for nature recovery, reflecting their role as landscape-scale corridors for wildlife and their potential to deliver wider benefits including improved water quality, natural flood management, climate resilience and public access. The strategy gives prominence to the upper Cam catchment and its chalk streams. These are internationally rare habitats which have been affected by a combination of water abstraction, modification of river channels, drainage, pollution and wider pressures on water quality and quantity. The LNRS includes a specific priority to conserve and restore chalk streams and their associated habitats, alongside measures aimed at improving their ecological function. These include creating and enhancing natural or semi-natural buffers alongside rivers

and chalk streams, reducing sediment and pollutant run-off, reconnecting rivers with their floodplains, restoring more natural river processes and improving riparian habitat.

This provides an important strategic context for the Council's work on the River Cam and its tributaries. Activities described elsewhere in this report – including partnership working on chalk streams, biodiversity enhancement, water-quality initiatives, management of riverside open spaces, natural flood management and collaboration with voluntary and community organisations – can therefore contribute directly to delivery of the LNRS.

The LNRS also provides an opportunity to move from individual projects towards a more connected, catchment-based approach. Future projects should, where appropriate, consider the LNRS Local Habitat Map and identified nature-recovery opportunities when developing proposals, seeking external funding or collaborating with landowners and partner organisations.

Alignment with Cambridge City Council Strategies

Within the **Biodiversity Strategy 2022–2030** the protection and restoration of the River Cam and its tributaries are aligned. Rivers, chalk streams, wetlands, springheads and riparian habitats form important parts of Cambridge's ecological network.

Water quality is itself a biodiversity issue. Characteristic chalk-stream plants, macroinvertebrates and fish depend upon suitable combinations of nutrients, dissolved oxygen, temperature, flow, sediment and physical habitat. The physical appearance of a watercourse, or the completion of habitat works, cannot therefore demonstrate ecological recovery on its own.

Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (GCCSP) and Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (CCSP)¹ combine physicochemical monitoring with biological and habitat evidence so that interventions can be designed and evaluated according to ecological function as well as physical outputs. This supports the Biodiversity Strategy's emphasis on larger-scale connected projects, long-term monitoring and measurable nature recovery.

CCSP will consequently be one of the Council's principal delivery mechanisms for freshwater biodiversity recovery, subject to individual interventions being supported by appropriate evidence, consents and long-term management arrangements.

¹ CCSP is the next, larger-scale phase arising from the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (GCCSP). It will apply the evidence, monitoring and practical lessons developed through GCCSP across Cambridge's connected chalk-stream network.

Cambridge Chalk Street Project (CCSP) should be understood as multifunctional green-blue infrastructure rather than solely as a biodiversity or physical river-restoration project. Its intended functions include biodiversity recovery, pollution mitigation, improved water quality, drought and flood resilience, wetland and riparian habitat management, ecological connectivity, community participation and long-term freshwater stewardship.

There is also a strong relationship with the **Urban Forest Strategy 2026–2036**. Riparian trees can provide shade, temperature moderation, woody habitat, bank stability and ecological connectivity. However, chalk streams also support aquatic plants that require appropriate light conditions.

The appropriate approach is therefore evidence-led riparian tree management rather than an assumption that either additional planting or canopy removal will be beneficial in every location. Decisions about retention, planting, coppicing or selective canopy opening should be made reach by reach, taking account of temperature evidence, channel characteristics, aquatic vegetation, bank stability, public safety and ecological objectives.

This reflects the wider principle of CCSP: an intervention should not be applied uniformly simply because it may be beneficial under some conditions.

The Council's **Climate Change Strategy** is similarly relevant. Climate change is increasing pressure on freshwater environments through changes in rainfall, groundwater recharge, drought, temperature and the frequency of extreme weather. The resilience of the Cam catchment is therefore both a biodiversity and climate-adaptation issue.

CCSP will contribute to this work by integrating evidence concerning groundwater and springhead behaviour, seasonal flow, geology, topography, water quality and biological condition. Proposed technical work will also consider drought and flood scenarios so that interventions can be assessed against a range of future conditions.

The programme is therefore intended to contribute to biodiversity recovery, drought and flood resilience, water-quality resilience and climate adaptation. This does not mean that individual restoration measures will provide all these benefits automatically; the relevant benefits and limitations will need to be established for each location through design, assessment and monitoring.

Planning and Development

The planning system also has an increasingly vital role in delivering nature recovery. The Greater Cambridge planning framework, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements and the LNRS together provide opportunities to ensure that development contributes to a coherent ecological network rather than delivering isolated habitat interventions.

The LNRS should therefore increasingly inform consideration of opportunities associated with development, Biodiversity Net Gain, Section 106 contributions and other environmental investment, particularly where these can strengthen the River Cam corridor, chalk streams and their wider catchments.

This strategic alignment provides an opportunity for Cambridge to connect Council-owned land, planning interventions, externally funded projects and community-led activity into a broader programme of nature recovery across the River Cam catchment.

The Cambridge City Council Biodiversity Strategy 2026–2031 provides an important strategic framework for the Council's work to protect and enhance the River Cam, its tributaries and associated wetland and riparian habitats. The river corridor is one of the city's most important ecological assets, connecting internationally important chalk stream habitats with commons, parks, Local Nature Reserves and the wider countryside.

A key objective of the Strategy is to restore and enhance chalk streams and river habitats, recognising healthier chalk streams, riverbanks and associated wetlands as an important biodiversity outcome for Cambridge. This includes improving the ecological condition and connectivity of priority habitats along river corridors, enabling wildlife to move more freely through the city and between Cambridge and the surrounding countryside.

The River Cam and its tributaries also have an important role in strengthening the Cambridge Nature Network². The river, its tributaries, riverside commons and Local Nature Reserves provide a connected network of green and blue infrastructure through the city. Protecting and enhancing these corridors can increase the resilience of habitats and species to climate change and other environmental pressures while providing wider benefits for landscape, recreation and people's connection with nature.

² The Cambridge Nature Network is a landscape-scale spatial vision and partnership seeking to protect, enhance and connect important habitats across Cambridge and its surrounding countryside. The River Cam, its chalk streams, wetlands, springheads and riparian corridors form important elements of this connected ecological network. GCCSP and CCSP contribute to its objectives by improving freshwater habitats and strengthening ecological connections from Cambridge's springheads and tributaries towards the River Cam.

The Strategy supports delivery of the LNRS and provides a local mechanism through which opportunities identified by the LNRS can be translated into practical action. This is particularly relevant to the restoration of chalk streams, enhancement of riparian habitats, wetland creation and improved ecological connectivity across the wider Cam catchment.

The Council has already demonstrated how targeted interventions can improve river and wetland habitats. Projects such as the Logan's Meadow wetland creation and the Rush fish pass at Sheep's Green provide examples of practical habitat restoration and enhancement. The Strategy provides a framework for building on these interventions and identifying further opportunities on Council-owned land and through work with partners and other landowners.

There is also a particular focus on improving the condition of designated sites and Local Nature Reserves associated with the Cam corridor. Appropriate management plans, monitoring and targeted habitat interventions have been developed to ensure that these sites improve in ecological condition over time and function as part of a connected network rather than as isolated areas of habitat.

Development and green infrastructure planning also have an important role. The application of Biodiversity Net Gain, alongside planning policy and other developer contributions, provides opportunities to create, restore and connect habitats associated with rivers and watercourses. Where appropriate, investment should be directed towards strengthening green and blue corridors and delivering interventions that complement wider nature recovery priorities.

The Strategy recognises that many of the pressures affecting rivers cannot be addressed within administrative boundaries or by individual organisations. The Council therefore supports catchment-scale partnership working, including the principles of the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA), bringing together local authorities, environmental organisations, water companies, landowners, community groups and other stakeholders. This approach can help coordinate action on water quality, biodiversity, climate resilience, natural flood management, and habitat restoration across the Cam catchment. Through our CCSP funding we are supporting the Cam Catchment partnership Coordinator role hosted at the Wildlife Trust.

Finally, the Council is itself an important riverside landowner. Its parks, commons and open spaces along the River Cam and other watercourses provide significant opportunities for nature recovery. Management of these areas should therefore seek opportunities to improve riparian and wetland habitats while recognising that many are also highly valued and intensively used public spaces. The long-term approach will

	need to balance biodiversity enhancement with recreation, navigation, events, grazing, heritage, landscape and public access. Taken together, these priorities provide a clear strategic basis for the activities and projects described in this report. They also support a shift from individual site-based interventions towards a more coordinated river and catchment-scale approach, linking the Council's management of its own land with planning, external investment, community activity and the work of partner organisations.
5.	Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project
	The Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project represents one of the Council's most significant programmes of direct intervention in the Cam catchment. The project was established because the Council identified a gap between the local identification of potential physical restoration measures and the evidence required to determine which interventions would be most likely to produce sustainable ecological benefits. The 2019 Greater Cambridge Chalk Streams Audit provided useful observational information and identified potential works, but subsequent Council-led assessment concluded that further evidence was required to justify and prioritise effective in-channel intervention confidently. The Council therefore assembled funding from Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority, water companies and Council sources to create an evidence-led case-study programme investigating the principal factors affecting Greater Cambridge's chalk streams. GCCSP combines water-quality and biological monitoring, sediment and erosion assessment, hydraulic and ecological evidence, practical restoration, academic expertise and citizen science. Its central purpose is not to delay intervention but to reduce the risk of inappropriate or ineffective investment. The methodology moves the starting question from "what physical feature should be installed?" to "what processes are preventing ecological recovery, what evidence demonstrates this and what intervention can sustainably address them?" GCCSP has combined this investigation with substantial practical delivery. Within Cambridge, approximately 1,300 metres of in-channel restoration, 1,200 metres of bankside stabilisation, 2,400 square metres of bankside habitat improvement and 1.4 hectares of springhead and spring-system restoration have been delivered.

The Cambridge case-study works and associated springhead restoration have been completed. Remaining River Granta works at Abington and Linton are expected to conclude the practical GCCSP programme in October 2026, with monitoring intended to continue to provide an early post-restoration dataset.

Water-quality evidence

A comprehensive monitoring framework has been established in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University and a network of citizen scientists. Monitoring covers rural and urban chalk-stream sites and examines nutrients alongside pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen, conductivity and turbidity.

The quarter one 2026 evidence identifies significant pressures across the network. Nitrate exceeded the project's indicative chalk-stream target at every monitored site. Cambridge City sites were also affected, with Cherry Hinton Brook and Coldham's Brook commonly recording nitrate concentrations around 13 mg/l N. Phosphate frequently exceeded the project's threshold, while ammonia was lower but with episodic spikes.

The evidence demonstrates why river condition cannot be assessed from appearance alone. Turbidity, dissolved oxygen, pH and bacterial indicators can identify short-lived events and localised pressures that would otherwise be missed. The emerging picture is of chalk streams under pressure from nutrient enrichment, low flows, fine sediment, urban runoff, thermal stress, localised pollution pathways, invasive species and historic channel modification.

This evidence is increasingly being used to inform restoration design. Rather than applying generic chalk-stream solutions, interventions are developed according to flow, sediment behaviour, water quality, channel form and ecological need.

The monitoring programme combines regular physicochemical sampling, laboratory nutrient analysis, continuous logging and biological evidence. This is important because short-duration pollution events, first-flush runoff, temperature changes, dissolved-oxygen stress, turbidity and sediment movement may occur between occasional site visits.

The absence of visible pollution, or the presence of apparently attractive physical habitat at a particular moment, cannot therefore be treated as evidence of ecological health.

Regulatory classification and ecological restoration design also answer different questions. Water Framework Directive and UKTAG³ classifications provide an essential regulatory framework, while restoration design may need to consider episodic, cumulative or reach-specific pressures affecting sensitive species or life stages. Project ecological benchmarks should therefore be presented as restoration and risk-management tools, not as alternative statutory compliance standards.

This evidence increasingly allows the Council to examine not only whether pollution is present, but where and when it enters the system, the load involved, the ecological

response and where it may most effectively be intercepted or mitigated before progressing towards the River Cam.

Moving from project to long-term programme

The current GCCSP delivery phase is due to conclude in October 2026 following completion of the remaining River Granta habitat and visitor-access works at Abington and Linton. Water-quality monitoring at these locations is intended to continue until July 2027 to establish a stronger post-restoration dataset.

A funding agreement with Cambridge Water has been confirmed whereby the project will deliver part of Cambridge Waters' statutory obligations in its Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) to undertake river restoration, providing up to £1.9 million for chalk-stream restoration within Cambridge City. The overall programme is intended to cover the connected urban network including Coldham's Brook, Cherry Hinton Brook, Hobson's Brook and Vicar's Brook, working from springhead to main river.

The programme will include interventions such as in-channel restoration, appropriate gravel augmentation, woody material, marginal and wetland habitat creation, riparian planting and management, buffer creation, pollution mitigation and improved fish passage. The precise intervention at each location will depend upon the evidence identifying the factors limiting ecological recovery. The work will also strengthen the evidence base for effective river restoration interventions through hydrological modelling, geomorphological profiling, flow monitoring, and further water-quality investigation.

³ UK Technical Advisory Group (UKTAG), which develops the technical standards and assessment methods used by the UK environmental regulators to classify the ecological and chemical condition of water bodies.

Logan's Meadow Wetland Creation Project



The Logan's Meadow Wetland Creation Project provides a strong example of how partnership working, external funding and community-led action can deliver significant biodiversity and wider environmental benefits along the River Cam corridor. Located within Logan's Meadow Local Nature Reserve, the project has created new wetland habitats designed to enhance biodiversity, strengthen ecological connectivity, improve floodplain function and increase the resilience of the site to climate change. The scheme contributes directly to the objectives of the Cambridge Nature Network, the Council's Biodiversity Strategy and wider nature recovery ambitions for Greater Cambridge.

The project originated from a vision developed by the Friends of Logan's Meadow, working with Cambridge City Council and a range of environmental and community partners, including the Cambridge Nature Network and Natural England. Importantly, the project demonstrates how different sources of external investment can be brought together around a shared nature recovery objective.

Funding was secured from a number of sources, including National Lottery funding to support design and consultation, Natural England Green Recovery funding for woodland buffer creation, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority funding, and developer contributions secured through Section 106 agreements. Bringing these different funding streams together enabled a more ambitious and integrated scheme than would have been achievable through a single source of funding.

Construction of the new wetland features has created a mosaic of aquatic, marginal and surrounding terrestrial habitats, increasing opportunities for wetland-dependent wildlife

	and improving the ecological diversity and connectivity of the reserve. Early monitoring has recorded species including water vole, otter and kingfisher, illustrating the potential for appropriately located habitat creation and restoration to produce rapid ecological benefits. The project also demonstrates the importance of the Council's riverside parks, commons and nature reserves as places where nature recovery can be delivered alongside public access and recreation. In addition to biodiversity enhancement, the scheme provides benefits associated with climate adaptation, floodplain restoration, community involvement and improved access to nature. Logan's Meadow therefore provides a practical example of the approach advocated elsewhere in this report: combining community initiative, Council land management, partnership expertise, external grant funding and developer contributions to deliver nature recovery at a strategically important location. The lessons from the project can help inform future opportunities for wetland creation, riparian habitat enhancement and river restoration elsewhere along the River Cam and its tributaries.
6.	Community Participation and Citizen Science
	A significant strength of GCCSP has been the combination of community participation with professionally governed monitoring and evidence. Volunteers provide regular local monitoring, observations, practical support and longer-term stewardship. Anglia Ruskin University and other specialist partners provide scientific protocols, laboratory analysis, biological monitoring, quality assurance, interpretation and evidence synthesis. The project has supported training in river-habitat assessment, data-logger maintenance, aquatic-plant identification, non-native species management, safe working and the leadership of practical work parties. Through the PEBBLE⁴-supported programme, 46 volunteers contributed 368 hours of practical support, with an indicative in-kind value of £4,493.28. This model increases monitoring and practical capacity without lowering the evidential standard. Citizen science supplements and strengthens professional evidence; it does not replace it.

⁴ Cambridge Water's Pebble Fund provides grants for community-led projects that support water conservation, biodiversity and improvements to the local water environment. It may offer a potential funding route for smaller-scale river and chalk-stream restoration, monitoring, education and community-engagement projects



Water quality monitoring

7

River Cam - Council Land and Riverbank Management

Cambridge City Council is a significant riparian landowner. Its responsibilities extend beyond biodiversity projects and include management of major public open spaces and sections of riverbank adjoining the Cam.

These responsibilities include vegetation and tree management, public access, bank management, drainage and flood resilience, biodiversity enhancement, management of recreational activity and maintenance of Council-owned infrastructure.

Major riverside open spaces include Jesus Green, Midsummer Common, Stourbridge Common, Sheep's Green/Lammas Land, Coe Fen, Paradise Local Nature Reserve and other sites through which the Cam and its tributaries pass.

These areas need to fulfil several functions simultaneously: important ecological corridors, floodplain, highly used recreational spaces, historic landscapes and routes for walking, cycling and access to the river. The Council's management approach therefore

needs to balance ecological enhancement with public safety, access, recreation, flood management, heritage and operational requirements.

Council-owned riverbanks, commons and open spaces should increasingly be considered as parts of a connected green-blue ecological network, while recognising their equally legitimate recreational, heritage, navigation, access and operational functions.

Evidence generated through CCSP can help inform decisions concerning bank stability, erosion, sediment, vegetation, shade, water quality and ecological connectivity. The intention is not for biodiversity to override every other use, but for routine land-management and capital decisions affecting river corridors to take appropriate account of freshwater ecological function.

Residential Moorings

The Council has a long-established role in managing residential moorings on sections of the River Cam where it is the riparian landowner. This forms part of the wider management of the river corridor and requires the Council to balance the needs of the residential boating community with navigation, biodiversity, public access, recreation and the amenity of adjoining open spaces.

The Council currently provides 75 licensed residential moorings, comprising 60 narrow-beam and 15 wide-beam spaces. Residential mooring is permitted alongside areas including Jesus Green, Midsummer Common and Stourbridge Common, with pontoon provision at Riverside. Moorings are allocated and managed in accordance with the Council's River Moorings Policy and associated rules and regulations.

The Council's responsibilities include the allocation and annual renewal of licences, management of waiting lists, setting and collecting licence fees, management of designated residential, visitor and temporary mooring areas, and addressing breaches of mooring conditions. Licence conditions also help protect the river and adjoining open spaces, including controls relating to waste and sewage discharge, nuisance, obstruction, smoke, generators and the use of moorings for business activity.

This role is distinct from that of the Conservators of the River Cam, who are the statutory navigation authority. Residential vessels therefore operate within a framework in which the City Council manages use of its riverbank and mooring spaces as landowner, while the Conservators regulate navigation and vessels on the river. This illustrates the wider theme of this report that effective management of the Cam frequently requires different organisations to exercise complementary responsibilities.

Residential moorings also represent an established community on the river and need to be considered when significant river infrastructure or environmental projects are developed. Projects affecting riverbanks, access, navigation or water levels should therefore consider potential effects on residential moorings at an early stage, alongside ecological, engineering and public-access requirements.

Commercial Punt Stations

Commercial punting is another important use of the River Cam and is integral to Cambridge's visitor economy and the character of the city centre. As with residential moorings, responsibility is shared between the Council and the Conservators according to their respective roles.

The Conservators recognise and license six punting stations in Cambridge, including stations at La Mimosa/Jesus Green, Quayside, Trinity College, the Mill Pond at Silver Street, Mill Lane and the Granta mill pond near Sheep's Green. Not all of these are on City Council land.

Where commercial punt stations operate from Council-owned land or landing stages, the Council acts principally in its capacity as landowner and commercial property owner. Long-standing arrangements at the Jesus Green/La Mimosa punt station, for example, have allowed operators to trade from Council-owned landing stages under agreements granted by the Council as landowner, while the Conservators separately regulate navigation and grant commercial punt licences.

The letting and management of commercial punt stations therefore provides the Council with a further mechanism for managing activity associated with the river. Commercial arrangements need to secure appropriate use of Council assets while also considering public access, congestion, environmental impacts, neighbouring uses and the quality of the riverside environment.

Commercial punting and residential moorings demonstrate that the Cam is not solely an environmental asset. It is simultaneously a habitat, navigation, home, workplace, visitor attraction and recreational space. The Council's role as riparian landowner consequently requires these uses to be managed alongside the biodiversity, water-quality and climate objectives described elsewhere in this report,

Industrial water offtakes

Several decarbonisation projects are being developed across Cambridge to support the transition to net zero. These include proposals for river-source heating, such as the

	Darwin College scheme granted planning permission in 2025, and the larger city-centre heat network being explored by the Council in partnership with city-centre colleges. River-source heat systems abstract water temporarily, extract heat through a heat exchanger and return the water to the river at a lower temperature. Subject to their design, scale and operating conditions, such schemes may contribute to the decarbonisation of heat while potentially helping to moderate some of the artificial warming experienced by the River Cam as it passes through the developed city centre. These potential benefits should not be assumed or considered in isolation. Each proposal must assess its effects on river flow, water temperature, water quality, ecology, fish and other aquatic species, navigation and the cumulative impact of other abstractions and discharges. Any scheme must be designed and operated sensitively and obtain the necessary planning permission, Environment Agency licences and environmental permits before it proceeds. The Council should continue to engage with the Environment Agency and scheme promoters so that the carbon benefits of river-source heat are considered alongside the protection and, where practicable, improvement of the River Cam's ecological condition.
9	Sheep's Green and Bathing Water
	Sheep's Green and Coe Fen Local Nature Reserve is an important location for the interaction between public access, recreation, biodiversity and river water quality. The Council has undertaken and is progressing works at Sheep's Green to improve the site and its relationship with the river. The delivery of The Rush fish pass at Sheep's Green Local Nature Reserve represents a significant achievement in the restoration and enhancement of the River Cam corridor within Cambridge. The scheme was developed to improve fish passage around the historic mill structures and water control features that can impede the movement of aquatic species. By reconnecting sections of the river and creating more natural flow conditions, the project has enhanced habitat connectivity, supported biodiversity, and contributed to the ecological resilience of the River Cam. The project demonstrates the value of partnership working and has become an exemplar of how targeted infrastructure improvements can deliver benefits for both wildlife and people.



The Rush Fish Pass, Sheep's Green

Building on the success of The Rush, partners are now progressing the Sheep's Green Watercourse Creation scheme, which will further enhance the ecological value of Sheep's Green and the wider river corridor. Supported by funding from the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP), the project will restore and create watercourse habitats, improve wetland features, and increase opportunities for aquatic and riparian species. The scheme is expected to deliver biodiversity gains, improve habitat connectivity between the River Cam and adjacent green spaces, and increase the resilience of the site to future environmental pressures, including climate change.

The project has successfully completed its development and design stages and is currently progressing through the costing and procurement phase, with delivery anticipated following contractor appointment. Once implemented, the scheme will complement previous investments in the area, helping to establish Sheep's Green as a key component of the Cambridge Nature Network and a flagship example of urban river restoration that contributes to local biodiversity, water management and public enjoyment of the River Cam landscape

Sheep's Green also provides an important source of evidence through its status as a Designated Bathing Water. The Full Council motion specifically resolved that water-quality information from Sheep's Green should be used to press for action to improve the quality of the River Cam.

	Responsibility for regulating water quality does not rest with the City Council. However, as landowner and a representative of residents and river users, the Council has an important role in using monitoring evidence to engage with the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and other responsible bodies. Sheep's Green remains formally classified as having Poor bathing-water quality for the 2025 assessment year, and the associated advice remains that bathing is not advised. Monitoring during 2025 nevertheless showed some improvement compared with 2024, with many E. coli results within the range of 200–300 colonies per 100ml. However, several elevated results meant that the overall statutory classification remained Poor. Monitoring continues during the 2026 bathing season. The latest publicly accessible Environment Agency-derived record, from early August 2026, reported intestinal enterococci at 36 CFU per 100ml, with a pH of 8.1 and water temperature of 21°C. An accompanying E. coli result was not available within the published record reviewed. This individual result is encouraging but cannot be used on its own to determine whether water quality has improved sufficiently to alter the annual classification. Environment Agency investigations have identified both human and ruminant bacterial markers, indicating that the sources of faecal pollution are likely to be complex. The Council should continue to use statutory monitoring evidence to press the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, and other responsible bodies for completion of source-apportionment work and delivery of measures capable of securing a sustained improvement in water quality. Bathing-water and ecological monitoring provide different but complementary forms of evidence. Designated Bathing Water monitoring is particularly important for assessing public-health risks and identifying faecal contamination. It does not, on its own, provide a complete assessment of freshwater ecological condition. GCCSP and CCSP provide complementary evidence concerning nutrients, dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity, turbidity, sediment, flow and biological response. Bringing the two evidence streams together, where relevant, will provide a stronger basis for the Council's engagement with the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and other responsible organisations.
10	River Infrastructure - River Wall
	The City Council is the riparian owner of the river wall at Jesus Green. The affected section lies between Jesus Green Lido and Jesus Green Lock. Inspections and investigations have confirmed that the wall is actively moving and rotating, creating a

gap of up to two feet between the concrete capping beam and the soil embankment and indicating ongoing structural failure.

In October 2024, a budget of £850,000 was approved for repair works. That estimate was based on a high-level assessment of the length of wall requiring repair and assumed that conventional construction plant could operate from the bankside. Subsequent arboricultural, engineering and geotechnical investigations have demonstrated that this delivery assumption is not achievable.

The wall adjoins an avenue of mature trees. The scale of land-based plant required for the piling works would cause unacceptable impacts on root-protection areas and tree canopies. The works must therefore be undertaken from the river using floating plant and pontoons. Low bridge clearances restrict the type and size of equipment that can reach the site and require specialist river access, plant and construction solutions. These constraints materially increase the complexity and cost of the project.

The technical assessment has identified steel sheet piling as the most viable solution capable of meeting the site's geotechnical and load-bearing requirements while maintaining the required river frontage alignment. Alternative hard-engineering solutions would incur higher costs, longer installation periods and greater embodied carbon. Softer revetment approaches would not provide the necessary structural performance or maintain the required river alignment, particularly given the proximity of existing infrastructure and the adjacent lock.

The enhanced total project budget estimate is up to £2,411,000. This reflects the revised water-based delivery methodology, specialist plant requirements and appropriate risk allowances identified following the site investigations. The original £850,000 provision is already included within approved budgets and the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The additional budget requirement and its funding source should be confirmed through the Council's financial decision-making arrangements.

An open tender using a two-stage procurement approach is proposed. At Stage 1, a preferred contractor would be appointed under a Pre-Construction Services Agreement to work with the Council and design team to develop the detailed design, temporary works, river logistics, construction methodology and final cost plan. Stage 2 would involve negotiation and entry into the main construction contract. If an acceptable contract sum cannot be achieved, the Council would retain the ability to re-tender the developed scheme. A reliable cost estimate will be available for the Councils Budget Setting Report 2027/28.

	This approach reflects the lessons from previous major infrastructure projects by securing specialist contractor involvement before the Council commits to the main works. It is intended to improve buildability, cost certainty and risk allocation and to reduce the likelihood of inflated tender prices or substantial variations during construction. Subject to approval of the enhanced budget, the programme anticipates commencement of the competitive tender process by October 2026. Failure to intervene would create a risk of localised collapse and potential impacts on Jesus Green Lido, Jesus Green Lock, the boat-user foul-water pump-out facility, adjoining footpaths and strategic cycle routes, underground fibre-optic and drainage infrastructure, mature trees and the riverbank environment. Continuing reactive maintenance or delaying the project would not provide an acceptable response to the active structural movement. The Council has explored opportunities to coordinate the wall works with the adjacent Jesus Green Lock Island repairs being progressed by the Conservators of the River Cam. Shared access arrangements could provide efficiencies, but the Conservators' programme is progressing more slowly than is compatible with the condition of the Council-owned wall. The Council's project should therefore continue to be coordinated with the Conservators but should not be delayed where that would increase the risk of structural failure. Any shared arrangements must clearly allocate cost, liability and future maintenance responsibilities.
11	Jesus Green Lock and the Conservators of the River Cam The Conservators of the River Cam are a statutory corporate body and remain the navigation authority for the River Cam. Under the legislation governing the Conservators, they are responsible for the regulation of navigation and river traffic and for the maintenance and operation of navigation infrastructure, including locks, weirs and sluices. Those responsibilities remain with the Conservators unless and until the governing legislation is amended or repealed. Jesus Green Lock and Baits Bite Lock have required intervention because of structural concerns. A longer-term solution is required for Jesus Green Lock, and the Full Council motion recognises that the cost of major navigation infrastructure can exceed the resources normally available to the Conservators through navigation income alone. The City Council has therefore been working with the Conservators and other partners to understand the condition of Jesus Green Lock, potential engineering solutions, funding requirements and its relationship with the adjacent Council-owned river wall. The Council has an important interest in this work as a riparian landowner and because failure of significant river infrastructure could have wider consequences for navigation, water levels, recreation, biodiversity and the management of adjacent public land. The

	Council also appoints seven of the thirteen Conservators and consequently has a significant governance interest. This does not, however, make the Council directly responsible for the Conservators' finances, operations or statutory navigation functions. Section 12 of the Cambridge City Council Act 1985 provides that the Council may, if it thinks fit, pay money to the Conservators. Legal advice records that this is a discretionary power, rather than a statutory duty to fund the Conservators or make good any deficit. The 1985 Act removed the Council's historic responsibility to make up deficits incurred by the Conservators. Any proposal for a Council contribution would therefore require a separate decision under the Council's normal financial and governance arrangements, having regard to the purpose, benefits, affordability, risks and any conditions attached to the funding. The Conservators cannot be dissolved, wound up or have their statutory functions transferred through a simple governance decision by the Council or the Conservators. Advice obtained by the Council indicates that the Conservators' statutory duties continue while the governing legislation remains in force and that dissolution, or the transfer of navigation responsibilities to the Council or another authority, would require legislative change and extensive consultation. Any alternative long-term model would also need to identify which body would assume the navigation function, infrastructure liabilities, regulatory powers, assets and ongoing financial obligations. The immediate focus should therefore be on practical collaboration within the present statutory framework. The Council can use its convening role, governance interest and relationships with public bodies, landowners and potential funders to help the Conservators explore sustainable business and financial options and to develop a deliverable solution for Jesus Green Lock. This should not be interpreted as the Council accepting responsibility for the Conservators' statutory functions, operational liabilities or future deficits.
12	Planning, Water Resources and Sustainable Growth
	The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service has undertaken substantial work examining the relationship between development, water supply, abstraction, wastewater capacity and environmental constraints as part of preparation of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. Water availability is a strategic constraint for Greater Cambridge. The issue is particularly important because of the relationship between groundwater abstraction and the chalk aquifer which supports the area's chalk streams. The formation of a Cambridge Water Scarcity Group in 2023 brought together the key agencies to identify solutions. The objectives of the Water Scarcity Group are to advise

government on the development of a detailed approach to water scarcity issues in Greater Cambridge in the short, medium, and long-term, and to advise on wastewater and drainage services. The Group is chaired by Dr Paul Leinster (current Chair of Water Resources East and previous Chief Executive of the Environment Agency), and consists of key stakeholders including water companies, Water Resources East, the Environment Agency and water regulators, and the local planning authorities.

Measures being implemented include a Water Efficiency Programme to retrofit public buildings and social housing with water efficiency and water reuse measures. Government funding has been provided to the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service to implement the programme, which has now commenced. A second phase involving other stakeholders has also commenced to explore a wider range of efficiency and reuse measures in different types of buildings. A water credits system has also been considered and could be subject to further work in future. Programmes are also trialling nature-based solutions to assist with aquifer recharge and exploring a range of measures with the agricultural sector.

Water plans by Cambridge Water and Water Resources East include various additional measures to address short term water issues, including measures to increase water efficiency, an enhanced metering programme, leakage reduction through a range of measures, and risk-based approach to abstraction management. Strategic water supply solutions are also planned. A pipeline connection to Grafham Water will boost supplies to the Cambridge area from 2032. The Fens Reservoir will further increase supplies from 2036 (at the earliest). In addition to helping meet future water supply needs they will enable reductions in abstraction from existing sources, helping to restore and protect the chalk streams in Cambridge.

To consider the impact of additional development being explored through the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service commissioned a Water Supply Evidence to accompany the draft Local Plan in 2025, and it was updated in 2026 to accompany the Proposed Submission Local Plan. Working closely with the Water Scarcity Group this also produced a water supply dashboard, allowing different growth scenarios to be tested.

The development trajectory in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan has taken account of water supply availability, and the availability of the strategic water supply interventions.

The adopted 2018 Local Plan implemented the optional standard for water efficiency set out in national planning guidance (110 Litres per person per day (LPD) design standard), which is more stringent than the standard building regulations requirement. It also set requirements for non-domestic buildings using BREEAM standards.

	Higher standards have already been achieved in many recent developments. For example, the village centre development at land North of Cherry Hinton has a standard of around 100 LPD, and the Virido site at Great Knighton which includes communal rainwater harvesting will delivery around 80 LPD. The Proposed Submission Greater Cambridge Local Plan proposes to tighten standards further, requiring highly water efficient design standards in housing and non-housing developments which go beyond Building Regulation levels. These draw on approaches set out in the Shared Standards in Water Efficiency for Local Plans developed by water stakeholders and are informed by other evidence including from the Enabling Water Smart Communities project. The emerging strategy has considered wastewater treatment capacity to accommodate the planned development. Upgrades will be required to a number of treatment works to accommodate development needs. Policies require treatment to be available when development takes place. Officers have also been liaising with Anglian Water to ensure that their emerging Drainage and Waste Water Management Plan takes account of this. Planning policy has a wider role in protecting the river system through sustainable drainage, Biodiversity Net Gain, habitat connectivity, flood-risk management and appropriate assessment of development affecting watercourses. The Council motion recognises the extensive evidence prepared through the Local Plan process and states that future development should continue to be informed by evidence demonstrating sustainable water supplies, reduced abstraction, water efficiency and environmental capacity.
13	Statutory and Strategic Partnerships
	No single organisation has the powers, resources, or responsibilities necessary to address all the pressures affecting the Cam. The Council's role is therefore one of direct delivery where it owns land or assets, combined with partnership, evidence gathering, advocacy and influence where responsibilities sit elsewhere. Key strategic relationships include: • Environment Agency • Cambridge Water • Anglian Water • Conservators of the River Cam • Cambridgeshire County Council • Natural England • Water Resources East • Anglia Ruskin University

	University of Cambridge and colleges Through CCSP, the Council's role is developing beyond convening partners. It is leading a multidisciplinary programme combining water-company investment, university monitoring, scientific assurance, specialist procurement, local-government governance, and community participation. This enables the Council to act as an informed technical delivery partner: commissioning work, testing assumptions, integrating specialist evidence, and developing defensible restoration strategies. Responsibilities must nevertheless remain clear. Abstraction regulation, wastewater treatment, navigation, and environmental regulation remain with the relevant statutory organisations. The Council's leadership lies in taking responsibility for where it has powers and assets, generating evidence where it can influence others and ensuring technical questions are considered by people with the appropriate expertise.
14	Collaboration with Voluntary, Community and Catchment Groups
	An important feature of work to protect and improve the River Cam and its tributaries is the contribution made by voluntary organisations, community groups, trusts, and individual volunteers. These organisations provide local knowledge, relevant experience, monitoring capacity, practical delivery, community perspectives and independent advocacy, monitoring capacity, practical delivery and an important connection between statutory organisations and communities with a direct interest in the river. The Council recognises that the long-term health of the Cam cannot be secured through statutory organisations acting alone. Effective river restoration requires sustained collaboration between local authorities, environmental regulators, water companies, landowners, academic institutions, voluntary organisations, and communities. Where an individual or organisation possesses relevant specialist technical expertise, this should be recognised specifically. More generally, community organisations can identify concerns, gather observations, campaign for change, support monitoring and undertake practical activities. Technical causes and solutions should then be assessed using appropriate scientific evidence and specialist advice. The Council's approach should therefore be one of evidence-led partnership: community knowledge and advocacy identify questions; scientific investigation helps

establish cause; appropriate specialist expertise informs solutions; and statutory organisations retain their responsibilities.

Cam Valley Forum

Cam Valley Forum is a long-established voluntary organisation concerned with the River Cam and its tributaries. It provides an independent voice on issues including water abstraction, water quality, sewage pollution, river flows, biodiversity, and management of the wider catchment.

The Council and Cam Valley Forum have worked collaboratively on river-related issues. A significant recent area of shared interest has been the work associated with Designated Bathing Water status at Sheep's Green, which has enabled systematic monitoring to provide additional evidence about water quality in this part of the River Cam.

Voluntary organisations also provide constructive challenges to the Council and other public bodies. Partnership working does not require partners to hold identical positions on every issue. Independent scrutiny, local knowledge, and challenge can contribute to better evidence, greater transparency, and better environmental outcomes.

Cam Catchment Partnership

The Cam Catchment Partnership provides a broader catchment-scale mechanism for organisations and communities interested in the Cam and its tributaries to work together. Its work enables the river to be considered as a connected catchment rather than through individual administrative boundaries, sites, or projects.

This is particularly important because pressures including abstraction, pollution, sediment, habitat fragmentation and agricultural or urban runoff frequently arise some distance from where their ecological effects are observed.

The Council's involvement in catchment arrangements complements the more locally focused work being undertaken through the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project. As that project transitions towards a Cambridge City-focused restoration programme, wider catchment partnerships provide an important mechanism through which evidence and experience gathered by the Council can continue to support work elsewhere in the Cam catchment.

An emerging Cambridge city-focused river partnership group is strengthening coordination of activity within the urban section of the Cam and its tributaries, where development pressures, recreation, water quality challenges, and habitat fragmentation

are particularly significant. The group brings together key stakeholders with an interest in the river corridor to identify shared priorities, develop integrated projects and align investment. Its focus on practical delivery complements the strategic work of the Cam Catchment Partnership and supports wider objectives within the Cambridge Nature Network and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy, helping to create a healthier, more resilient, and better-connected river environment across Cambridge.

River Granta and local catchment groups

Cambridge City Council has not acted as the overall River Granta catchment lead. GCCSP's involvement in South Cambridgeshire has focused on the Linton and Abington case-study sites, investigating ecological decline, undertaking monitored restoration and establishing regular water-quality and biological monitoring.

The practical programme is expected to conclude in October 2026, while monitoring at Linton and Abington is intended to continue until July 2027 to provide an early post-restoration dataset and support an orderly transition to the developing South Cambridgeshire catchment partnerships.

This provides a positive project legacy. GCCSP will leave monitoring infrastructure, trained volunteers, practical restoration case studies, and evidence base upon which catchment organisations, landowners, parish councils and local communities can build.

Friends of the River Cam

Friends of the Cam is a local community and advocacy group campaigning for the protection and restoration of the River Cam. Its interests include water quality, abstraction, biodiversity, the effects of development and the wider recognition of the river's environmental value, including advocacy for the rights of the river. The group should therefore be recognised as a relevant stakeholder in future engagement and partnership discussions, while distinguishing its community and campaigning role from the statutory, regulatory and operational responsibilities held by organisations such as the Environment Agency and the Conservators of the River Cam.

Citizen science and practical environmental action

Citizen science has become a key component of the Council's chalk-stream work. The GCCSP monitoring programme is delivered with Anglia Ruskin University and supported by volunteers, enabling regular monitoring across the network and building

	an increasingly detailed evidence base concerning water quality, flow and ecological condition. Voluntary and community organisations can also contribute through habitat management, river clean-ups, monitoring, invasive-species control and identification and reporting of pollution or environmental deterioration. Such activity can supplement, but does not replace, the responsibilities of statutory organisations. The Council's role should include helping voluntary activity to be targeted safely and effectively and ensuring that community evidence can be connected to organisations able to investigate or address underlying environmental problems. Future approach There is an opportunity to strengthen the Council's relationship with voluntary and catchment organisations as the programme develops. This should include: • maintaining regular dialogue with key river and catchment organisations; • ensuring community and voluntary-sector knowledge contributes to project identification and design; • supporting citizen-science monitoring where it can contribute useful evidence; • sharing Council monitoring and project evidence where appropriate; • working collaboratively on external funding opportunities; • supporting practical volunteering and community stewardship where appropriate; • connecting locally identified concerns with the statutory organisation responsible for addressing them; and • ensuring that the emerging Cambridge City chalk-stream programme complements rather than duplicates wider catchment activity. It will also be important to maintain the independence of voluntary organisations. Their value lies not only in practical delivery but also in their ability to provide specialist knowledge, community perspectives and constructive challenge. The Council should therefore seek to develop these relationships as partnerships rather than simply delivery arrangements.
15	Future Environmental Projects and External Funding
	The Cambridge Chalk Stream Project is the landscape-scale implementation of the evidence and case-study learning developed through GCCSP. Cambridge City Council is the lead authority and accountable body for the programme.

Subject to confirmation of the final funding agreements, CCSP combines up to £1.9 million of Cambridge Water WINEP funding with grant funding for the Hobson's Brook pollution-mitigation and resilience component. The principal delivery period is July 2026 to March 2029, with monitoring, maintenance and management continuing beyond the capital programme.

The two funding streams are complementary elements of one controlled programme rather than separate chalk-stream restoration projects.

Cambridge Water WINEP

The £1.9 million WINEP allocation is the wider Cambridge restoration component of CCSP. It supports programme management and governance, research and technical assurance, planning and mobilisation, and capital habitat delivery.

This budget structure reflects the evidence-led methodology. Science, design, consents and assurance are integral parts of delivery and provide safeguards for the subsequent capital investment; they are not separate additions to the physical works.

Hobson's Brook pollution mitigation

The proposed grant funding approach will support the Hobson's Brook pollution-mitigation and resilience component of CCSP. The project will investigate, design and deliver nature-based measures intended to intercept and mitigate pollution before it reaches sensitive chalk-stream habitats and progresses through the connected freshwater system towards the River Cam.

The proposed methodology is to identify and quantify pollutant pathways, undertake modelling and design, construct the agreed measures, monitor inputs and outputs, validate performance and adapt future management where necessary.

The final value, funding conditions, approvals and ongoing liabilities must be confirmed before the agreement is completed.

Cambridge Water Pebble Fund

Cambridge Water provided a £27,000 PEBBLE grant for the 2025/26 delivery period. The funding was fully allocated to eligible practical biodiversity delivery at Hobson's Brook, Coldham's Brook and the East Cambridge Main Drain, Nine Wells and Giant's Grave.

	Of the total, £17,250 supported eligible habitat materials and £9,750 supported contractor installation. The funding was restricted to practical biodiversity delivery and was not used for project staffing, consultancy, monitoring, research or design. The PEBBLE grant provides an example of different external funding sources being combined and controlled transparently to deliver measurable environmental outputs while avoiding duplication or double funding. Watercourse Land Drainage Model Byelaws The watercourses throughout the city provide essential surface water drainage functions and support valuable ecological habitats. Damage to, obstruction of, or unauthorised activities within these watercourses can increase flood risk, reduce biodiversity, impede maintenance operations and adversely affect water quality. To provide additional protection for ordinary watercourses, local authorities have powers to make byelaws under the Land Drainage Act. The adoption of model byelaws is recommended by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and is established practice amongst several risk management authorities. The Environment Agency, Conservators of the River Cam and South Cambridgeshire District Council already operate byelaws covering watercourses within their respective jurisdictions. The proposed byelaws would provide the Council with an additional regulatory mechanism to help protect watercourses from activities that may obstruct flows, damage banks, impede access for maintenance, or otherwise increase flood risk. The byelaws would also complement ongoing work to improve water quality, biodiversity and the resilience of Cambridge's chalk streams and wider water environment. The proposed byelaws are based on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' model byelaws and would apply to ordinary watercourses within the administrative boundary of Cambridge City Council. Subject to Cabinet approval, officers would undertake the necessary consultation and statutory approval process prior to the byelaws being formally adopted and brought into force.
16	Opportunities for Improvement
	The review demonstrates that a substantial amount of activity is already taking place. The principal opportunity is therefore not necessarily the creation of additional structures, but better coordination and visibility of existing activity. Future work should focus on:

	• maintaining and strengthening the evidence base; • moving from individual demonstration projects towards catchment and network-scale restoration; • identifying and addressing pollution pathways; • integrating water quantity, water quality, biodiversity and physical habitat; • improving coordination between Council projects and external partners; • maximising external funding; • supporting community stewardship and citizen science; • ensuring Council land and assets are managed consistently with biodiversity and climate objectives; • embedding river and water considerations within planning and development; • improving communication with residents about the condition of the Cam and actions being taken; and • maintaining clear distinctions between matters for which the Council is responsible and those requiring action from statutory partners. A simple programme or pipeline of river-related projects could provide a useful mechanism for recording project status, funding, lead organisation, outcomes and dependencies. This could also provide the basis for periodic reporting through the Council's Biodiversity Strategy and associated governance arrangements rather than creating a separate permanent reporting structure.
17.	Corporate plan
17.1	The recommendations support the Council's corporate priorities by protecting and enhancing Cambridge's natural environment, strengthening the city's resilience to climate change and supporting the sustainable management of its natural assets. The River Cam, its chalk streams, tributaries and adjoining open spaces form an important part of the city's green and blue infrastructure and contribute significantly to biodiversity, recreation, wellbeing and Cambridge's sense of place. The proposed programme demonstrates the Council's commitment to working collaboratively to achieve these outcomes. Delivery will involve statutory agencies, water companies, academic institutions, voluntary and community organisations, landowners and other partners. The South Staffordshire Water and other grants will enable the Council to use external investment to increase the scale and pace of environmental improvement, while supporting community participation, citizen science and partnership working. The recommendations also support a more sustainable and financially responsible approach to delivery. Rather than treating individual river projects in isolation, the report proposes a more coordinated and evidence-led programme, using monitoring and environmental evidence to prioritise interventions and maximise external funding. This

	will help ensure that Council resources and partner investment are directed towards projects capable of delivering demonstrable environmental and community benefits. Taken together, the recommendations support the Council's ambitions for a greener, fairer and more resilient Cambridge, combining nature recovery and climate adaptation with improved public spaces, partnership working and responsible use of Council and external resources.
18.	Consultation, engagement and communication
18.1	The activities described in this report involve significant ongoing engagement with statutory bodies, environmental organisations, water companies, academic institutions, landowners, voluntary and community organisations and other partners with an interest in the River Cam and its tributaries. Partnership and community engagement has been an important feature of the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project. This has included collaboration with Anglia Ruskin University and citizen scientists undertaking water-quality and environmental monitoring, together with volunteer training and practical involvement in the management and stewardship of chalk streams. The Council also works with voluntary and catchment organisations, including Cam Valley Forum, the Cam Catchment Partnership and local Friends and conservation groups. These relationships provide local knowledge, specialist expertise, monitoring capacity and constructive challenge alongside practical opportunities for joint delivery. Engagement will continue as the Cambridge City chalk-stream programme and individual projects are developed. The nature and extent of consultation will be proportionate to each project and will include affected communities, landowners, river users and relevant statutory and community partners where appropriate. This will be particularly important where proposals affect public open space, access, residential moorings, navigation or established recreational uses. There is also an opportunity to improve communication about the work taking place across the River Cam and its tributaries. Bringing projects together as a more coordinated programme should make it easier to communicate the evidence informing investment, the respective responsibilities of the Council and other organisations, progress with individual projects and the environmental outcomes being achieved.

19.	Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact
19.1	The Full Council motion provides an opportunity to bring together a wide range of work already being undertaken to protect and improve the River Cam and its tributaries. The Council is not the sole body responsible for the condition of the river. Its ability to influence abstraction, sewage treatment, navigation infrastructure and regulatory matters is necessarily dependent upon effective engagement with the organisations holding those statutory responsibilities. Nevertheless, the Council has an important and increasingly active role. It is a major riparian landowner, manages important riverside open spaces and infrastructure, leads significant biodiversity and chalk-stream projects, participates in water-resource partnerships and, through the Shared Planning Service, has an important role in ensuring future growth responds appropriately to water scarcity and environmental capacity. The Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project demonstrates the value of combining evidence, practical restoration, academic expertise and community participation. Its monitoring has identified significant and complex pressures affecting both rural and urban chalk streams, while the transition to a Cambridge City-wide programme supported by up to £1.9 million of WINEP funding provides a significant opportunity to move from individual interventions towards coordinated restoration of the City's connected chalk-stream network. Alongside this work, investment in the River Cam wall, work concerning Jesus Green Lock, improvements at Sheep's Green, planning for sustainable water resources, collaboration with voluntary and catchment groups, and the development of externally funded environmental projects demonstrate the breadth of Council activity relating to the Cam. The next stage should focus on coordination, delivery and outcomes: ensuring that the Council's own projects are aligned, external funding is maximised, evidence informs investment, community expertise is utilised and the Council continues to use its influence to secure action from organisations responsible for water quantity, water quality and river infrastructure.
20.	Implications
20.1	Financial Risk
	The programme described in this report combines existing Council resources with significant external investment. External funding provides an opportunity to increase the scale of environmental improvement without the full cost falling on the Council. It can, however, create requirements relating to programme management, procurement,

	technical assurance, monitoring, maintenance and the future ownership of assets and liabilities. The progression from GCCSP to CCSP represents a risk-managed approach to environmental investment. The Council first assembled a multi-funder programme to establish baseline evidence, undertake monitored case studies and develop practical delivery capability before progressing to landscape-scale investment. Research, monitoring, design and technical assurance should therefore be understood as safeguards for the capital programme rather than simply as project overheads. They reduce the risk of investing in interventions that fail to address the principal environmental constraint or cannot be sustained. Subject to confirmation of the final funding agreements, no Council match funding is currently assumed for CCSP. The agreements must nevertheless define eligible expenditure, Council staffing implications, procurement requirements, maintenance responsibilities, asset ownership, monitoring commitments, treatment of VAT and the arrangements applying if external funding or project outputs change. Significant capital expenditure is also proposed for the Council-owned Jesus Green river wall. The budget, funding sources and any related revenue implications will be set out separately within the relevant financial and project approvals.
	Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)
20.2	The recommendations have been developed to avoid creating unnecessary structural dependency ahead of Local Government Reorganisation and to maintain flexibility in future operating arrangements. Temporary and phased implementation approaches reduce the risk of embedding arrangements that may require redesign during transition.
	Legal Implications
20.3	The Council has a range of statutory functions and powers relevant to the matters described in this report, including those relating to planning, biodiversity, land ownership, open-space management and drainage. Other statutory responsibilities rest with organisations including the Environment Agency, water companies and the Conservators of the River Cam. Partnership and funding arrangements will need to clearly identify responsibilities, liabilities, ownership of works and future maintenance obligations.

	The environmental aspirations contained in the Full Council motion do not transfer statutory responsibility for abstraction, wastewater treatment, navigation or environmental regulation to the City Council. Similarly, ecological benchmarks used by GCCSP and CCSP are tools for restoration design and ecological risk management. They should not be presented as statutory compliance standards or as replacing established regulatory classifications. The funding and partnership agreements for CCSP must clearly address the Council's legal powers, eligible expenditure, procurement, landowner permissions, environmental and flood-risk consents, liabilities, ownership of completed works, maintenance and monitoring obligations, and exit or variation arrangements.
	Equalities and socio-economic Implications
20.4	Rivers and riverside open spaces provide important opportunities for recreation, wellbeing and access to nature. Restoration and infrastructure projects should therefore consider accessibility alongside biodiversity and environmental objectives and seek, where practicable, to improve opportunities for a wide range of residents and visitors to experience the river.
	Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications
20.5	The recommendations are expected to have positive climate change and environmental implications. The programme described in this report will support the restoration and improved resilience of the River Cam, its chalk streams, tributaries, wetlands and associated riparian habitats. Climate change is expected to place increasing pressure on Cambridge's water environment through periods of drought and low flows, higher temperatures, more intense rainfall and increased flood risk. Restoring more naturally functioning rivers, wetlands and floodplains, improving riparian habitats and increasing ecological connectivity can help the natural environment adapt to these pressures and improve its resilience to future climate change. The proposed programme will also support the Council's wider environmental objectives through habitat creation and restoration, improved biodiversity and ecological connectivity, measures to address pollution pathways, and interventions designed to improve the condition and resilience of chalk streams. The use of nature-based solutions, including the proposed Hobson's Brook pollution-mitigation project, provides

	opportunities to deliver multiple benefits for water quality, biodiversity and climate adaptation. The South Staffordshire Water-funded chalk-stream programme will enable interventions to be developed on an evidence-led basis, taking account of water quality, hydrology, channel condition and ecological need. This should help ensure that investment is targeted towards the factors limiting ecological recovery rather than applying standard interventions irrespective of local conditions. There may be short-term environmental and carbon impacts associated with the construction and delivery of individual projects, including the use of materials, plant and transport and temporary disturbance to habitats and public spaces. These impacts will be considered through project design, procurement and, where applicable, ecological, flood-risk, planning and environmental consenting processes. Opportunities to minimise embodied carbon, reuse materials and adopt lower-carbon construction methods will be considered as individual schemes are developed. Overall, the recommendations are considered to make a positive contribution to climate adaptation, biodiversity recovery and the resilience of Cambridge's water environment. The principal climate benefit is expected to arise from adaptation and resilience rather than direct operational carbon reduction.
	Procurement Implications
20.6	The acceptance of external grant funding does not in itself commit the Council to the appointment of suppliers or contractors. Any goods, works or services required to deliver the projects described in this report will be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and applicable procurement legislation. The conditions attached to the South Staffordshire Water and other funding will be reviewed to ensure that any requirements relating to expenditure, procurement, delivery timescales and reporting are compatible with the Council's procurement obligations. Individual projects may require the procurement of specialist professional services, surveys, design work, monitoring equipment and construction or environmental works. Appropriate procurement routes will be determined as individual schemes are developed, taking account of value, complexity, available frameworks and the requirements of the relevant funding agreements. Where appropriate, procurement will also seek to secure wider social, environmental and carbon benefits, consistent with the Council's policies and the nature of the individual project.

	There are therefore no procurement implications that prevent acceptance of the proposed grant funding. Subsequent expenditure will remain subject to the Council's normal procurement and governance requirements.
	Community Safety Implications
20.7	There are no significant adverse community safety implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report. The River Cam and its adjoining open spaces are extensively used for recreation, navigation, walking, cycling and other activities. Individual river restoration and infrastructure projects will therefore need to consider public safety, safe access to the river and adjoining open spaces, and the interaction between construction activity and existing river users. Where works are undertaken, appropriate risk assessments, site management arrangements and temporary access restrictions will be put in place as necessary. Consideration will be given to works affecting riverbanks, paths, navigation, residential moorings and other areas of high public use. In the longer term, investment in riverbank infrastructure, appropriate management of riverside land and improved environmental condition should contribute positively to the safety, resilience and quality of the river environment.
21	Background documents Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
21.1	None
22	Appendices
22.1	None
	To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Alistair Wilson, City Services, alistair.wilson@cambridge.gov.uk

